



George W. Hill
Oral History Transcription
September 9, 2003 [Tape 2, Side A]

Interviewed by:	Lester Lamon, David Healey
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Transcribed by:	Amanda Parkinson, Student Worker, Civil Rights Heritage Center
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Summary:	George Hill was a graduate of Washington High School and an all-city basketball player. He attended Central State University in Ohio for a while on a basketball scholarship but returned to South Bend to help his family. Back in South Bend, he became involved in city government and politics, working on the campaign of Jerry Miller, who was mayor from 1972-76. Hill spent most of his career working for various job training programs.

0:00:00 [David Healey]: More and more history and we say to [inaudible].

[George Hill]: Yeah, he come down once a week go through all the new airplanes and stuff. And I'm sure he brought them from all of his pocket. The Hering House didn't fund that.

[DH]: Jess Dickinson did?

[GH]: No. Cole... Cole... the... the...

[Les Lamon]: His son did.

[GH]: Cole... Cole... Yeah Coleridge. Yeah.

[DH]: You're talking about what Dr. Lamon was trying to talk about Uncle Bill was worked at Mitchell's

[nods yes].

[DH]: He was called the house man.

[nods yes].

[DH]: Something about this local history there's a lot of numbers

[GH]: Yeah.

[DH]: Here.

[LL]: Numbers running around...

[GH]: Yeah, my father he... he was a policy writer.

[DH]: And as a little boy you used to run...

[GH]: I used to turn in the books he... would count up... my daddy would count up the numbers and put the money in envelopes I'd get two envelopes. One in... two envelopes. The due and the banner would go to Smokes the sugar... the rear cut and the sugar and the ricca would go to Mitchells.

0:01:11 [LL]: What do those... what do those terms mean?

[GH]: That's the name of... when you play that's what you playing on see. I may write four books...

[LL]: Ok.

[GH]: So you may say I wanna put this on the ricca and this on the sugar hill this on the dew and this on the banner like baseball teams

[LL]: Alright okay. I don't know...

[GH]: That was the name of the wheel.

[LL]: I see. Those were...

[GH]: That's what you playing.

[LL]: Ok.

[GH]: But he would and I couldn't... I was a little boy but what used to amaze me about my dad... what was amazing about him was I told you he didn't have a formal education, but I never told any of this. I should have told him this before he died. He'd take that pencil... cuz working and he gotta go to sleep cuz he gotta go to Torrington that night. He'd take that pencil he got all this everybody who played 15 20 25 30 all odd money and he'd have you got four books and he had to move fast cuz he got get locked out. We'd barely get n in every day. I'd barely run up there, I couldn't reach the counter. I give [inaudible] he'd grab it. And daddy would take a pen... you talking about adding machine he'd take that pencil and he wouldn't stop and it had to be right and be precise. He'd take that pencil and do this. Make spades. Wouldn't stop. I mean he wrote... wrote as fast as his eyes could move he adding it up.

0:02:40 [LL]: Just adding it up in his head.

[GH]: [nods yes]. Yeah.

[LL]: Wow.

[GH]: I mean I never told him... I told people I'd be talking I should have told my dad I never do that. I respect that he told me to go to school but daddy my math teacher in school couldn't do that...

[LL]: Oh heavens no.

[GH]: I mean I'm talking about... I ain't talking about. I'd be doing this...
Make sure.

[DH]: Sure

[GH]: It's gotta be right. You know if I move this fast...

[LL]: He's just doing it...

[GH]: As fast as his eyes could hit that down there. He got ten to twelve
pages there...

[LL]: It was right every time.

[GH]: Right every time. I turned it in, and they would never shut him out.

[LL]: Smoke Pierce was out on Washington?

[GH]: Chapin.

[DH]: He was on Chapin.

[GH]: He was on Chapin... he had a tavern he had the tavern and then he
had the joint. I grew up with his grandson.

0:03:39 [LL]: What should we know if we're writing a book about race relations and
especially civil rights movement and making changes in South Bend.
What... what would you say we should... What would be the most
important thing we should say?

[GH]: Making changes?

[LL]: Yeah, if we were you know we are we're gonna look to writing a book
about race relations and about particularly the civil rights movement and
bringing change in some of these areas. What would you think are the
most important things that we should include in that book?

0:04:28 [GH]: The most important thing is South Bend would have to be and I'm
just probably biased to jobs because I ran jobs programs is probably equal
opportunity... that's probably not worded right. For jobs that a person can
do if and the job thing comes in then everything else is going to fall in
place if you didn't give my grandfather a job how do you expect the
grandkids to make it? So, all about the racial thing, the strife, the people

hating each other, sure you see coming here and hollering about you walk in all about Petco wouldn't give me a job today. Kids hear that then they take it to school. That's where the pushing and shoving comes with the kids. You see where I'm coming from?

0:05:54 [LL]: Yep.

[GH]: And it tears... if there's no finance in the house nothing else is going to matter I mean there isn't anything else you can do to heal no wounds if everybody around there is starving to death.

[LL]: Did that change in your working life here and why did it change?

[GH]: I think I did. You know I'm not bragging or nothing but I'll tell you the mayor said do it and you put the people to work who needed to work and I know I made probably made some white people mad, but I made the ones that were liberal happy because they would come in there and say man you doing it.

[LL]: And you did that and I applaud you. I am reading this because you decided to get involved in the system

[GH]: Yeah. I got... that's right. I got involved.

[LL]: You got involved.

[GH]: You gotta work.

[LL]: And you got a position and you made a difference.

0:06:57 [GH]: That's right that's right. They... You had to work from inside... you had to work from inside out. When I was down there you talking about you had the Model Cities. You had the urban zone downtown and the mayor called me up they called us in from the streets. I knew who was out there clowning. We talked back and forth and things unraveled real fast and then I kept working with that group I kept working and working and working and working and working and explaining to them you can't steal you can't do this. You can't boom boom boom and I was at a cookout on my niece's house and she's an attorney and someone came to me and said, "in 1975 you turned my life around you gave me a job." And said, "you know I loved there." And I said, "you still remember that because I'm gon' forget it". The other guy sitting across said, "you got me on at AM General said I been there 22 years." I said, "man look here don't put... it's

not me it's you I knew you'd work. The only reason you was there is..." I would always do that so he said, "you don't want to take credit for nothing." I said, "naw, you went to work. That's why I got you the job. You did it for yourself," but see the average guy would say, "I know man keep on talking I'm bad." But I put it back on him I said, "naw, you did it. and you put a lot of people out there," and when he left he said [inaudible] I said, "No, you don't have to do me that way I don't care." Nah... yeah... I will say this. When I retired I said, "my mission is accomplished, OK?" I would tell them. Somebody say something about the mayor I would say, "but wait a minute, hold up. He made me available for me to help you!"

0:08:47 [GH]: "I can't do it alone". Ok and that and I'll tell you now I'm not bragging Ok, but I was happy with what I did. A lot of folks said, "if I had a chance to do it again I would have did this I would have did that." I don't think I could have did no more. That's just me thinking

[LL]: Well by the time you got involved in that we had something called fair employment practices law.

[GH]: Yeah.

[LL]: In the 50s and 60s they were working to try to get the fair employment practices law. Were you probably growing up you were conscious... did you know a guy for example named Billy Morris?

[GH]: Yeah yeah, that's who I worked for... Al Watson. You ever heard of him?

[LL]: Oh yeah.

[GH]: Well see Al Watson when Billy left town...

[LL]: I saw yeah, he took over Billy's thing didn't he?

[GH]: OK. He hired me at LaSalle Parks Homes... you know where the project is over there. I was the first project manager out there

0:09:47 [LL]: Ok.

[GH]: Ok Al hired me.

[LL]: Ok.

[GH]: Ok.

[LL]: What did Morris have... I mean Watson worked for Morris.

[GH]: He ran the whole agency.

[LL]: Ok.

[GH]: On Hill Street, the whole agency... and they had a contract to manage LaSalle Park Homes

[LL]: I didn't know that.

[GH]: Yeah, the contract, so All hired me and put me on site. My office is right there on that corner where the office is right now. I was the first one that... as a matter of fact I moved out there they only had the quads the houses on that side built. Those double-deckers they were still building them.

[LL]: Ok

[GH]: I left to go to Ivy Tech while they were...

[LL]: Alright.

[GH]: While they were building those. I knew Billy Morris real well.

[LL]: And you know when he left? He left in 65 I think.

[GH]: Yeah.

[LL]: Went to New York to work for the NAACP.

[GH]: [nods yes]

0:10:38 [LL]: He was... I've gotten into found a lot letters and things he was... was working on in the early 50s and on to try and get passed a fair employment practices law. To keep from discriminating he was trying to get a fair housing ordinance to keep the banks and others from restricting where blacks could live.

[GH]: That's right that's right that's right that's right

[LL]: How was he perceived in the city do you know? Do you have any ideas?

[GH]: Well, he was a businessman. People all respected him because he was considered smart. Smart... no Uncle Tomming at all. Straight up you asked... if you go soft you could get a little something out the deal for yourself.

[LL]: Yeah

[GH]: Well he wasn't perceived that way at all.

[LL]: No, I don't think so. Not from what I read.

0:11:35 [GH]: Nah, nah, nah, he was strong see he was trying to get the multiple listing for the houses. His agency I think at that particular time he was the only realtor that wasn't involved

[LL]: Kept him outside.

[GH]: Yeah, they kept him outside of that.

[LL]: Now, he was suing the South Bend realty board.

[GH]: Ok.

[LL]: And for whatever reason it was coming to trial and that's when he left.

[GH]: Is that right?

[LL]: Yeah and it was never coming to trial because he moved to New York.

[GH]: That's right. Okay that's when he moved out of here in '70 and Watson took his place and I worked for..

[LL]: So Morris had the contract to manage LaSalle Park Homes.

[GH]: He had the whole contract. He had the whole contract. See I got along with Al real well. Because Al was something like me he was firm and fair but al wasn't scared of the street guys. You know and I came from there see so the street guys couldn't... they couldn't... their threats and

bullying and all that they couldn't do that with me and then LaSalle Park Homes if somebody wanted to go over my head to get an apartment if they didn't qualify they couldn't get to Al. You know you get to your boss and say nah nah. I fired a maintenance man, and he was strong in the community. Al said, "you stay this ain't baseball. Managers don't go." I'll never forget that. As far as strong now, Billy Morris was probably as strong... as far as not scared of the system, he was probably as strong as any black guy I knew.

0:13:18 [LL]: He was challenging the system, constantly.

[GH]: He wasn't scared of the system at all.

[LL]: Did you know anything about where he came from or anything about his personal background?

[GH]: No, he was here and he was laboring when I was a youngster, and he just kept going and kept going and kept going.

[LL]: I'm going to have to try to find out. Maybe I can find out from the NAACP.

[GH]: No.

[LL]: Because, I don't know... he moved here I know he was not from South Bend.

[GH]: Nah

[LL]: But don't know where he came from or how he ended up coming to South Bend, but by about 1951 he's already making his mark as you see.

[GH]: Oh yeah, he was...

[LL]: Who were the other strong black leaders in town? In the area of pushing for equality and justice?

[GH]: I was trying to think. Back in those days. That's about it. There was a lot of fear.

0:14:32 [LL]: Nobody else come to mind...

[GH]: No. The repercussion thing was...

[LL]: When Al Watson left LaSalle Park Homes he went to... he succeeded Jess Dickinson at Housing Authority.

[GH]: No, Al Watson see... when he left Billy Morris you mean?

[LL]: No, when he left Billy Morris he was managing LaSalle Park Homes for Billy Morris.

[GH]: No, he got the contract to manage the project period so he stayed in the office with Billy Morris... because Billy Morris had an insurance agency over there he had... he was collecting rent from people. People that didn't want to mess with tenants.

[LL]: He was managing property.

[GH]: He was managing property, so he stayed in the main office on Hill Street.

[LL]: Billy did?

[GH]: Nah, Al Watson did.

[LL]: Billy had left.

0:15:25 [GH]: Okay.

[LL]: He stayed there I hear you now.

[GH]: But then he hired an on-site manager for the project, which was me.

[LL]: Ok so you were the... he wasn't on site...

[GH]: I was on site.

[LL]: You were on site

[GH]: Yeah

[LL]: And you stayed there until you went to Ivy Tech

[GH]: Ivy Tech yeah.

[LL]: And that was when?

[GH]: Must have been '68 - '68 yeah.

[LL]: Who managed it after you?

[GH]: They had a series of individuals. One of them was Willie Middlebrooks.

[LL]: Oh, I remember Willie.

[GH]: You remember Willie?

[LL]: He was in my class that I taught.

[GH]: Was that right?

[LL]: [nods yes].

[GH]: Willie was one of them.

[LL]: He's in Indianapolis now...

[GH]: Yeah!

[LL]: A radio personality.

[GH]: He came by the house and stopped and said come down and see me sometimes. I said you gon' see me big time.

[LL]: Yeah.

[GH]: He was moderator on some it was some big names on there.

[LL]: Yeah, I talked to him and I was at a banquet where he was the emcee down there, and I went up and talked to him. Yeah. I haven't seen him in a long time.

0:16:24 [GH]: Yeah.

[LL]: But then Watson when did he move...

[GH]: Watson what he did after he left Billy Morris they closed the agency.

[LL]: They closed the agency...

[GH]: He started working for a white realtor... a white business realtor what was his name... the office is now out there on Lincolnway it's before you get to Mishawaka he was just selling houses.

[LL]: I see.

[GH]: And he stayed there selling those houses until the housing authority job came open.

[LL]: And he followed Jess Dickinson there, didn't he?

[GH]: No no no. Kent Wilcox was over there.

[LL]: Oh yeah.

[GH]: Kent was at Model Cities with... Kent was at Model Cities with...

[LL]: Lennon.

[GH]: Lennon and Hollis Hughes was there and Tidwell was with Lennon. John Tidwell and Hollis Hughes was deputy directors of Model Cities and Chuck Lennon was the executive director.

0:17:23 [LL]: That's right.

[GH]: Nah he... nah he they had Bob Thomas. Nah the had several Three or four directors.

[LL]: Ok. David did you have anything else that you...

[DH]: Oh yeah.

[LL]: Well, go ahead...

[DH]: Let's go back to LaSalle Park up there in the 60s there were several gangs in that area I think you mentioned you had dealings with people out there in that area young gangs. You had the shooting at the... in 67 at the LaSalle Community Center.

[GH]: Yeah right.

[DH]: You were out in the thick of that then with those dealing with the people...

[GH]: Well, I wasn't in... I was still working at Bendix then, but I was I knew all about the shootings and stuff because I was still back and forth with Winston Vas and Vas was still at Central then and I was still a follower of Neagu at that time when Neagu... the thing you talking about was when the policeman...they had the black leaders inside and they boom... they kind of messed up a little bit and they shot Melvin Easton... they shot Melvin in his leg.

[DH]: Phillips wasn't it?

[GH]: Sorry Melvin Phillips. His sister lives across the street from me.

[LL]: Yeah.

[GH]: Yeah Melvin. Melvin Easton. Shot Melvin Phillips in the leg so I was real familiar what that.

0:18:50 [DH]: The community seemed to have been very angry...

[GH]: They was mad.

[DH]: At the city during that time

[GH]: Yeah. That's right

[DH]: Do you know Ralph Mills... Miles

[GH]: Miles yeah.

[DH]: He was a member of a gang?

[GH]: Okay.

[DH]: Out there, and he mentioned to me that sometimes they would get the police out there and they would take shots at them and then run and the police would come by and shoot off tear gas. So the community was very angry.

[GH]: It was mad.

[DH]: Guess the question is what were they angry about? When you look at it from that...

0:19:24 [GH]: Well, first of all when they shot Melvin, you had Dickinson... Valjean... Carole... Valjean was inside. Jess Dickinson was inside the building. Joe Sadler, my brother-in-law we worked at Chambers. They were all in the building having a meeting. And boom they shot... I wonder who made the mistake. They all blasted in there on them. They all had hit the floor. So, the feeling at that particular time was they wasn't going to give a black a break so they only choice was to do... was to raise up I mean the system wasn't going to give you a fair break. I was pissed off! So I'm working. I'm making some big money. I didn't go to the streets because I didn't have to, but it wasn't a lot of hope at that particular time. They said, "the police gon' do what they want to do." You got the kids that are running and hollering and screaming and then that happened you asked... the bullet and kids take his leg. That's strong. You was crying before and we still and it happened...

0:20:44 [LL]: You screaming?

[GH]: That's right you screaming. Now it was nasty. Some bad feelings

[LL]: Did those changes that you mentioned earlier like paving some of the streets and improving the parks and things like that...

[GH]: The older folks probably... that probably helped the older folks, but the younger kids they didn't care about that very much. But like I said Vas... what cooled the thing was when Vas took Neagu's place and he came to the streets.

[LL]: Okay.

[GH]: As a matter of fact I'll show you... Nah I don't' got it. George McCullough was in... Before Vas died him and Oldham was in Louisiana at Vas's house and he showed them a picture and I think I was in there with arm bands.

[LL]: Oh, is that right?

[GH]: The task force. I had picture, but somebody must have taken it out of my book. The task force, that was the street. Vas would call me at three o' clock in the morning and say...

0:21:46 [LL]: So, you all got out on the street.

[GH]: Yeah, yeah, he called me at three in the morning and say, "meet me at so and so," and I just looked up to Vas and I got of bed and go meet him. I wasn't getting paid.

[DH]: Dr. Chamblee said he would go down there during the time too.

[GH]: As a matter of fact they had a shooting - you right it was in Memorial hospital. Who was that guy who was shot somebody got shot at the Top Deck right downtown and we all went down and I'm sure I think the only person the police set inside the hospital was Dr. Chamblee back in the emergency room. I'm sure that's what happened because we was all trying to get in there. They said they ain't gon let nobody in there but Dr. Chamblee. I think he was in there then. Two guys. A black and white kid got to fighting downtown.

[LL]: Top Deck what was that? I don't think I remember...

[GH]: The Top Deck it was...

[LL]: A night club type of place.

[GH]: Yeah, for kids I think it was right where right across the street from Teacher's Credit Union downtown,

0:22:44 [LL]: Oh ok.

[DH]: It's been several things over the years.

[GH]: Yeah yeah yeah I think it was Top Deck. Yeah, I'm sure it was Top Deck. Yeah, you're right Chamblee was involved because I remember in the evening when I got down there I think Vas told me said they ain't letting nobody back in there. He couldn't go in there. But Chamblee was it was late man three o clock in the morning and the cars were double parked all out there on Colfax hitting the horns and hollering.

[LL]: Oh yeah.

[GH]: Yeah, it was nasty out there.

[DH]: Did you belong to groups like Dr. Chamblee's black American coalition or the NAACP or the Urban League?

[GH]: No, I was involved with Vas when he took over for Neagu. I was on the task force. I wish I had the picture. He got a picture of George...

0:23:30 [LL]: George has the picture.

[GH]: No Vas... He had it I had one I may still have it. I'm going to look. I had one with we had the arm bands on...

[LL]: Yeah, that'd be a great one to have.

[GH]: I may still have that I'ma look in there. I may still have that. Because LC Cole and me was together and so Vas was working the group was representing the city, and that was you know to have somebody in the city administration that has the mayor's ear... had Allen's ear to come to and talk to us. That meant something to us. We didn't get a chance to I never talked to Mayor Allen. But he could... Vas could walk into the center... he handled that job real well. He could walk into LaSalle Park Center. Anything happen. He show up so they ain't got to be out there talking about the man down town because he'd be there.

[LL]: Yeah. That's good and that's an interesting piece to have there too and I'm was the picture that you had was that from the paper,

0:24:35 [GH]: It was in the paper it said task force on there.

[LL]: We might be able to find it in the...

[GH]: Yeah LC Cole and I was on the I'm sure it may have been somebody else but I'm sure that LC Cole and I was on the picture. But I think George told me when he was down to Vas's place because he's a Mason, and he was a Mason and he went down a couple or three years ago and there was a scrap book I think George said he saw the picture in the scrap book.

[LL]: Ok. Now Vas is dead, now.

[GH]: He just died.

[LL]: Yeah

[GH]: Yeah he... The fella I played ball with in high school. That's Dr. Easton. Remember when he was tried to get a job as superintendent?

[LL]: Yeah, I remember that. He was living in Fort Wayne wasn't he.

[GH]: Yeah. We played on the same team together at Washington. He was a year ahead of me. He came out of that neighborhood. He came out of the hood. I know him when I was a little boy.

0:25:22 [LL]: Ok

[GH]: Now he's superintendent in Lafayette, Louisiana now.

[LL]: Oh.

[GH]: Got a real big district.

[LL]: Ok

[GH]: Yeah, a real big district.

[LL]: Vas was down there too though?

[GH]: No, he called me up that Friday Vas was in Louisiana... he retired and lived in New Orleans.

[LL]: Ok

[GH]: So, he called me up that Friday and said I'm on the way to New Orleans. He was in Mississippi then. That's before he got to Louisiana. Easton my buddy. He said I'm going to stop by and take Vas to dinner. I said, "man he died. Norma Ganaway just told me he died." And he said, "you gotta be kidding". I said, "naw, I just heard it." I said, "good thing you called." He said, "I'm glad I did call. It would have been kind of embarrassing."

[LL]: Kind of embarrassing

[GH]: He didn't know he was on his way driving on the way down there...

0:26:17 [LL]: And that must have been right before Mrs. Ganaway died too then.

[GH]: Yeah. It was probably a couple years... about a year before she died. A couple of years before she died. yeah. About a year before she died.

[LL]: You mentioned. You mentioned Joe Sanders. He's your brother-in-law.

[GH]: Married sisters.

[LL]: Yeah. Now somebody mentioned to me that I don't know that there was. Did he have something to do with encouraging black businesses in the chamber?

[GH]: He was... that was his job. As a matter of fact he got an article in the paper yesterday or today about his son. You see in the paper? John Sanders. About the business he had on Olive Street.

[LL]: Sanco.

[GH]: That's Joe.

[LL]: That's right. That's right. But he worked with the chamber to?

[GH]: He was he was he was SBA what was that not metro director. Yeah, that was his job at the chamber.

[LL]: Ok.

[GH]: Since he wasn't making loans and show them how to do the applications

0:27:16 [LL]: How long was he down... would he have been down there... I'm trying to thing whether one thing we don't know much about are black businesses in the 50s and 60s we got you've got a few but we don't know a whole lot about black businesses then was he working at the chamber... when did he start working at the chamber?

[GH]: Ohh, he was working when they closed Studebaker. When they closed Studebaker.

[LL]: 64...

[GH]: No, he came out... I got a job in the factory. I got a job at Rockwell. So, he was at Rockwell in 66, 67. He must have... he was there in the late 60s because he was... when I... he was at the chamber when I was at Ivy Tech.

0:28:01 [LL]: Ok. That would be the late 60s. then.

[GH]: Yeah.

[LL]: He might be someone who we want to talk to, too because there must have been some kind of initiative...

[GH]: You know Joe died. Joe Sanders.

[LL]: Oh, when did he die?

[GH]: He died a couple of years ago.

[LL]: Didn't know that.

[GH]: Yeah. That was his son's article in the paper yesterday.

[LL]: I just saw that son coming back to do the thing. I didn't read the whole article. So he's dead

[GH]: Yeah.

[LL]: I didn't realize that. Well it might be again though there's gotta be that department at the chamber might be worth...

[GH]: Steven Teague in that was the...

[LL]: Yeah..

[DH]: They may have some papers there

[DH]: Papers saved by his relatives.

[LL]: Or just even the records of the office. They might have lists of black businesses.

0:28:54 [GH]: Yeah, yeah. He put some people he he helped with SBA loans, and it was quite a crew. Still is business now. That went through him for SBA loans.

[LL]: That might be worth checking out. David?

[DH]: I think that's about all I have.

[LL]: We have taken a lot of your time.

[GH]: I just had retired I gotta get out here because I said I... I told my wife I gotta go to the eye doctor first and get goin'. But I'm glad I got a chance to talk to you.

[LL]: Yeah this is great.

[GH]: I know I'm kind of jerky... not as smooth a speaker...

[LL]: Listen that's the way interview...

[Audio ends]